



LETTERS TO THE TIMES

Disney Clarifies Plans for Mineral King Area

A Times editorial (May 7) on Mineral King stated that "Walt Disney Enterprises, which has National Forest Service authority to develop Mineral King, wants nothing to do with financing, operating, or, if necessary, subsidizing the railroad" which would take visitors into the area. Later the editorial stated, "In Mineral King, where a single entrepreneur will be benefited, it would be especially inappropriate for the government to pay for the access."

In announcing this plan, Walt Disney Productions made clear the following points:

1—Walt Disney Productions has stipulated that it would enter into a contract to operate the publicly owned transportation system on a nonprofit basis, thereby assuring the lowest possible cost to the user. Revenues from the operation of the train would be fixed so as to return only the cost of operation and maintenance, and principal and interest over the 30-year term of the permit to be issued to Walt Disney Productions by the Forest Service.

2—We have suggested that financing of the electrically powered, narrow-gauge, cog-assist railway would be by means of revenue bonds, which might be issued singly, or in combination, by the County of Tulare, the state of California, or other governmental agencies responsible for the area. Revenue bonding would not "require the government to pay for the access," but would result in the capital being supplied by those who invested in the bonds. These bonds would, therefore, be paid for over a 30-year period by those who would use the transportation system. We believe it is in the public interest for the means of access to be publicly owned, and operated on a nonprofit basis. Walt Disney Productions would be the permittee, providing the accommodations and recreational facilities at Mineral King, just as the Yosemite Park and Curry Co. does for Yosemite National Park.

3—Walt Disney Productions has never suggested or sought any government subsidy for the railway. It was the Forest Service that originally required that access to the area be by an all-weather public road, the financing of which would have required the use of state gas tax revenues. The plan offered by Walt Disney Productions will result in a savings to California's taxpayers of more than \$30 million.

4—The existing right-of-way from Three Rivers into the Mineral King area rests with the county of Tulare. We do not believe it would be in the public interest for that right-of-way to be transferred to a private corporation, as would become necessary if Walt Disney Productions were to own the railway system and operate it at a profit.

The elimination of automobiles from our national parks and national forests has long been advocated by officials of the Park Service and other recreational planners. The Disney plan would make possible a prototype to prove that the public will accept access to our national parks and forests by means other than automobile. The train ride, in itself, will be a revolutionary and enjoyable experience for the general public.

E. CARDON WALKER
President
Walt Disney Productions
Burbank

Many thanks to you for supporting the proposed recreational development of the Mineral King Valley.

I am a skier as well as hiker (I was in Mineral King) and our state needs this additional area.

JERRY E. DAYTON
Los Angeles

The Times article (May 4) implied that only the wealthy have been able to enjoy Mineral King in its present undeveloped state. This is not true!

The majority of people who spend summer vacations camping at Atwells Mill or Cold Spring campground are not wealthy. I speak from 18 years personal experience. Transportation up there, some camping equipment (ours consisted of a \$14 tent and sleeping bags), a fishing license for the grownups, a camping permit, food for two weeks, was all that was necessary to enjoy a high mountain vacation experience. Can the Disney operation beat this price?

ELIZABETH J. SAMPLE
San Fernando

I agree that access to Disney's Mineral project should be at Disney's expense, but you are mistaken when you say "there are no detailed

studies available on the economics" of a cog railway system.

Ever been to Colorado Springs? The Pike's Peak cog railway has been in operation for years and appears to be a very reliable operation.

MICHAEL D. HOLLIDAY
South Pasadena

The real villain in this controversy is the U.S. Forest Service for having the audacity to propose a large-scale ski development at Mineral King without giving any thought to the adverse effects it might have on Sequoia National Park.

Any development as large as the one proposed for Mineral King could hardly fail to have a serious impact on the surrounding national park.

While I agree that the proposed cog railway through Sequoia National Park to Mineral King would probably cause less damage to the park than the previously proposed highway, still it would be one more intrusion of our mechanical civilization into a park that is intended to be kept in its natural condition for all time.

STANLEY J. HIGGINS
Los Angeles

What is most deplorable in the Mineral King controversy is the persistent use of inaccurate terms.

When Walt Disney Productions state they "responded to the public need," instead of stating they saw a good opportunity to make money, that is an inaccurate statement. Why be ashamed of the profit motive? It is at the foundation of our country's greatness. When the words, "public need," are uttered, the inference is that something of a charitable nature is involved and to object involves ingratitude.

A similar inaccuracy persists in the reiteration of "select few" or "wealthy few" with reference to those who now use Mineral King. Actually, with no more wealth than car ownership, it's easy to join that "select few." Just turn off at the road junction above Three Rivers. It's a beautiful drive up a mountain road. You park your car by the road, get out your pack and go. You don't need to be a Sierra Club member nor wealthy. For the same price as one motel-restaurant type vacation, you can equip your family so that you can hike anywhere in the Sierra with your motel on your back for the cost of gasoline and a little food. Or you can rent the gear you'll require.

AMY C. CONNER
Topanga

In your editorial (May 7) on Mineral King you offer an example of Zermatt, Switzerland for comparison. I have twice been to Zermatt and it is indeed a gloomy example. Whereas the Disney organization now proposes to substitute a cog railway for a highway this is certainly only a temporary measure. Ultimately this would yield to a highway as in Zermatt. Furthermore, it is incredible that this railway would be paid for with taxpayers' money.

Your suggestion that such a railway would be a useful experiment by the government to show the feasibility for such transport systems elsewhere is without merit. Even if tax money did not pay for the railway the experiment would promote the destruction of the Mineral King valley. Any of the developments now proposed for Mineral King would destroy the natural beauty of the area and irrevocably alter the ecology of this magnificent valley.

GORDON E. WOOD
La Canada

People involved in environment do a good job of monitoring and helping to shape imperfectly-planned projects. They help to produce order out of chaos. Environmental groups are people "who speak." Consider the possibility that the Mineral King recreational project by Disney will "take the heat off the Mammoth area"—an area that is rapidly being overdeveloped and "condominiumed," with lakes which are dying.

I am a member of an environmental group, but I do favor the Mineral King Disney project, for the reason stated above, and because there are so many members of the large population in Southern California who love skiing and would like to have a four-hour drive rather than a ten-hour drive, to an area which has snow longer than mountains surrounding the great city of Los Angeles.

MRS. B. REDMANN
Littlerock